

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes of February 9, 2016

- I. **ROLL CALL.** Chair John Quinn III, Selectmen Lynn Doney, Matthew Gadbois, Kenneth W. Goslant, and K. David Maxwell. Also present were Town Manager Jeffrey Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Town Health Officer Mark Podgwaite, David Armstrong (Green Mountain Transit Agency), Chris Loyer (Green Mountain Transit Agency), Dan Currier (Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission), Ian Blackmer (Northfield Farmers Market), Chandra Blackmer (Northfield Farmers Market), Gerard LaVarway, Elroy Hill, and Kathleen Lott (*Northfield News*).

Chair Quinn called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
- III. **SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.
- IV. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):**

- a. **Health Officer Mark Podgwaite: Elimination of Health Officer Stipend.** Mr. Podgwaite has served as Northfield's appointed Health Officer for the last fourteen (14) years but he only recently learned that the \$1000 annual stipend that went with the position had been eliminated in the current fiscal year budget. He added that he uses most of this stipend to cover the position's expenses and that he had never been contacted about this decision. Mr. Podgwaite first brought up this matter at the January 12, 2016 Select Board meeting and was now seeking an update. Chair Quinn said that at the earlier meeting Mr. Podgwaite claimed that he had a contract with the Town that specified a stipend but actually there is no written contract. Mr. Podgwaite felt that there was an implied contract when he was reappointed last year. Selectman Gadbois asked what were the expenses associated with the position. Mr. Podgwaite said that there were travelling expenses, his own time, etc. Selectman Maxwell asked how much these total expenses were each year. Mr. Podgwaite said that he never tracked them but estimated that some years the amount was more than \$1000 and other years it was less. He added that after the Amtrak derailment last year, he had to collect water samples, transport them to Colchester, Vermont to be tested, etc. He estimated that in this one case alone, his personal expenses were about \$300. Selectman Maxwell noted that when the Select Board members eliminated the Health Officer stipend, they eliminated their own stipend at the same time. Mr. Podgwaite felt that this was a different situation as he was never informed of this possibility and did not have the opportunity to discuss this with the Select Board before it went into effect. Chair Quinn felt the Select Board did have a responsibility to contact Mr. Podgwaite about the proposal to eliminate the annual stipend. Chair Quinn feels that the best course would be to provide Mr. Podgwaite with the \$1000 for the current fiscal year. In future years, there would be no set stipend but the Health Officer would be compensated for documented expenses related to casework. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to reinstate the \$1000 Health Officer stipend for FY 2015/2016 and to compensate for documented expenses in future years. Selectman Doney asked Mr. Podgwaite if he would continue in the position under these conditions. Mr. Podgwaite said that he would, provided that he is reimbursed for his expenses. Chair Quinn asked Mr. Podgwaite to make full use of existing municipal resources whenever possible. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **David Armstrong, Green Mountain Transit Agency (GMTA).** Mr. Armstrong is the GMTA Transit Planner and he wanted to provide the Select Board with an update regarding the services that GMTA provides to Northfield residents. For example, in FY 2014/2015, GMTA provided "door to door" transportation to 130 Northfield residents in order to access medical treatments, meal site programs, etc. There were 3289 trips of this nature with 35,597 total miles driven. This service is free to qualified riders (those eligible for Medicaid, etc.) and is supported by \$3,350 in Northfield's general fund budget.

In addition, there is the regular weekday commuter service between Northfield and Montpelier that charges \$2.00 for each one-way trip. The Town pays a twenty percent (20%) local match amount, which is \$21,000 each year. Northfield voters will be asked to support this service by approving Article 8 at the 2016 Town Meeting.

Chair Quinn asked if it is true that ridership on the commuter service has dropped twenty-one percent (21%) in the past year. Mr. Armstrong confirmed that this was the case. He attributed most of this decline to unexpectedly low gasoline prices, which have made it possible for more people to commute using their own vehicles. He added that this decline is across the board for all GMTA bus routes.

Chair Quinn noted that the commuter service had a commitment for federal funds that would fund the bulk (80%) of its operating expenses during the initial three (3) year period. He asked if these funds would be guaranteed in the future. Mr. Armstrong believes that provided that Northfield voters continue to support the local match amount, the Vermont Agency of Transportation would cover the bulk of expenses after the federal grant period ends.

Chair Quinn asked if the City of Montpelier picks up any of the cost of this service. Mr. Armstrong said that Montpelier did not provide funds for this particular route but it does fund a number of other local routes, including those connecting to neighboring towns such as Barre. Northfield riders do have access to these other routes through the commuter service. Chair Quinn did not feel this was fair since there are a number of Montpelier residents who use the commuter bus to get to their jobs at Norwich University, etc.

Chair Quinn then thanked Mr. Armstrong for the information provided this evening. Mr. Armstrong stated that he or someone else from GMTA will try to attend the upcoming public hearing (02/23/16) when Article 8 and the other Australian Ballot articles will be discussed (see below).

- c. **Dan Currier, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC): Village Green Stormwater Improvements.** Mr. Currier provided updated information regarding past or proposed stormwater improvement projects in Northfield. Using state grant funds, a “rain garden” was installed last year at the bottom of Central Street near Depot Square. CVRPC now is helping Northfield apply for additional grant monies in order to install two (2) bio-retention catch basins by the Holland Place parking area between Depot Square and the Dog River. The project would result in the loss of twelve (12) parking spots. Manager Schulz asked if there was any chance to relocate the project area closer to the river in order to save some parking spaces. Mr. Currier stated that the current project plans are in draft condition so changes can be made. He added that he viewed the site on a recent weekday and found that the affected spaces were not in use then. Chair Quinn would like the Depot Square parking situation kept in consideration as the project moves forward. Selectman Maxwell asked if the project area was all on municipal property. Mr. Currier confirmed that it was.

Selectman Maxwell asked if the Central Street “rain garden” really was working. Mr. Currier said that it was. It was capturing stormwater and sediment before it went into the municipal drain system. The proposed project on Holland Place would have an even greater impact. The coverage area for the Central Street project was about an acre but the new project will have seven (7) acres of treatment coverage. Selectman Maxwell asked if any other stormwater projects were under consideration. Mr. Currier said that a project for Water Street had been explored but it had not been funded. There is a separate flood mitigation grant application for this area that appears more likely to receive funding.

Selectman Gadbois felt that even through the Central Street rain garden might achieve its purpose, it definitely doesn’t look very attractive with its exposed wood structure, etc. Mr. Currier said that there are plans to add some greenery to the site this summer that would cover much of the structure. He added that the new project would be covered by shrubbery, etc. from the beginning.

Selectman Doney asked if the stormwater collected by the new catch basins would be treated before being released into the Dog River. Mr. Currier confirmed that all toxins would be removed beforehand. Selectman Maxwell asked if there would be any future maintenance costs for which the Town might be held responsible. Mr. Currier said there needs to be annual inspections to make sure it is operating as planned. Selectman Maxwell asked if Northfield Water Department personnel could provide these inspections. Manager Schulz said this has not been discussed yet but it was a possibility.

Mr. Currier said there would be a site visit with engineers in the next week or so. The final plans would be due next month and there will be every effort to complete the project this summer. Manager Schulz would like Mr. Currier to return for another update after the engineering plans were completed. Mr. Currier is willing to do so. Chair Quinn then thanked him for the report.

- d. **Ian Blackmer. Northfield Farmers Market.** Mr. Blackmer is requesting the Select Board's permission for Northfield Farmers Market to hold its 2016 outdoor markets on the Common every Tuesday afternoon from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The first market is scheduled for May 10 and the final one on October 11. Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to provide permission for the Northfield Farmers Market to use the Northfield Common as requested. Selectman Gadbois would like the market organizers to encourage the vendors to park off site as much as possible. Mr. Blackmer said he would make every effort to see this done. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **December 29, 2015 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Selectman Maxwell abstaining.**
- b. **January 26, 2016 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 3-0-2, with Selectmen Maxwell and Quinn abstaining.**
- c. **January 26, 2016 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 3-0-2, with Selectmen Maxwell and Quinn abstaining.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #16-16.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to approve Warrant #16-16 in the amount of \$464,467.04. Selectman Doney saw the purchase of numerous traffic signs and asked if this was a planned expense. Selectman Maxwell believes there was a mandate from the state to upgrade various street signs. Manager Schulz confirmed this was the case and said that he could provide a list of installation locations if needed. Selectman Gadbois asked about expenses to repair the sidewalk sweeper (i.e., MV machine). Manager Schulz believes that it was due to normal wear and tear but will check on the exact repairs. Selectman Goslant said that this machine appears to take a regular beating during the winter months. Selectman Gadbois then asked about a \$1700 purchase of ammunition for the Northfield Police Department (NPD). Manager Schulz said his is the annual allotment so that the NPD officers can qualify on the firing range and receive their certifications. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through January 31, 2016.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$79,042.73. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. **Liquor License Renewal: Cumberland Farms.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to approve the liquor license renewal for Cumberland Farms. NPD Chief James Dziobek has confirmed that his department had no issues with any of the local businesses that held liquor licenses last year. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Public Hearing (Australian Ballot Articles): Tuesday, February 23, 2016, 7:00 p.m.** Chair Quinn said that at this time anyone who would like to discuss these articles would be given an opportunity to do so. That includes representatives from the non-profit organizations that petitioned in order to receive public funding.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Possible Property Donation.** Selectman Gadbois understands that a Northfield Falls property owner is seeking to donate the land on which an apartment building stood before it was completely destroyed by fire. Manager Schulz confirmed that he has had conversations about this. Manager Schulz believes that there may be concerns about the current septic system and this has precluded any plans to rebuild. The Central Vermont Community Land Trust also is looking into this and the Select Board will be kept informed of any developments. Chair Quinn would not like the Town itself to take possession of the property as that would remove it from the Grand List.

- b. **Labor Day Firework Display Problems.** Selectman Gadbois saw that Gerard LaVarnway, whose property bordered the launching site and (with his wife) had bad experiences with the firework display, was present for tonight's meeting. He asked if there were any updates regarding Mr. LaVarnway's concerns. Manager Schulz stated that there is an application for residents to hold firework displays on their own property but any application to hold fireworks on municipal property now would have to go to the Select Board for approval. Selectman Gadbois asked if there had been an NPD report on why there were no responses to the LaVarnways' 911 calls. Manager Schulz said there was and he would forward it to the Select Board members. Selectman Gadbois would like the LaVarnways kept informed of any new developments. Manager Schulz said that he sent them a letter with the updated information.
 - c. **New Municipal Website, etc.** Manager Schulz said that there is a draft version of the new website that will be reviewed by the Economic Development Committee when it meets next week (02/17/16). The committee also will look into hiring a consultant that will help assess the best use of the \$45,000 in state grant funds that the Town received to redevelop Brownfields sites. There now are four (4) to five (5) sites under consideration.
 - d. **NPD Vehicle Fleet.** Selectman Doney was disturbed to discover that of the three (3) NPD cruisers now in service, recently only one was in operational condition. The other two were sitting in the garage waiting to be repaired. Selectman Doney felt that Northfield residents had been put in danger by this development as there could have been simultaneous incidents requiring assistance or a major event that required more than one NPD patrol in response. Chair Quinn asked how long the two cruisers were out of service. Selectman Doney cannot say offhand but will check on this. He also wants to know why the cruisers are not out patrolling during the day. Now that GPS units have been purchased and will be installed on the NPD fleet, Selectman Doney would like the mileage tracked for each vehicle as well as information about when they were used for patrol duty, etc. Manager Schulz will provide this information as soon as it becomes available. Selectman Doney also wants the Town Mechanic to certify that the GPS units are working once they are installed. If any of them are tampered with in the future, he would like the offender severely disciplined.
 - e. **Town-Owned Western Avenue Property.** Selectman Doney is concerned that the former owner of this property has been depositing new material on the site. Chief Dziobek has been informed of this but has taken no action. Selectman Doney felt that the Town spent a lot of money cleaning up the site after taking possession and does not want to pay a second time. Manager Schulz will look into this.
- X. **TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT.** Manager Schulz did not provide his written report prior to this meeting but will forward it to the Select Board members by email in the coming days.
- XI. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**
- a. **Gerard LaVarnway, Fireworks Permit Process.** Mr. LaVarnway said that he is not pleased with the responses he has received to date regarding his concerns. He did receive a letter from Manager Schulz a few months ago but nothing since then and still no explanation on why his 911 calls did not warrant a response. He then provided Manager Schulz and the Select Board members with a list of requests for specific information regarding the Town's fireworks permitting process, this lack of 911 response, etc. Chair Quinn asked Manager Schulz when he should have his response ready for the LaVarnways. Manager Schulz said that he should have it done by next Tuesday (02/16/16). Mr. LaVarnway asked if this would include a report from Chief Dziobek on why NPD officers did not respond to their 911 calls. Manager Schulz confirmed that it would. Selectman Maxwell would like this matter as an agenda item for the first regular meeting (03/08/16) after Town Meeting Day. He also would like to see a draft fireworks display policy prepared for that meeting.
- XII. **ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of February 23, 2016.